



Brian Boyle  
Commissioner of Public Lands

July 1, 1991

The Honorable Slade Gorton  
United States Senator  
SH-730 Hart Senate Office Bldg.  
Washington, D.C. 20510-4701

Dear Senator Gorton: *Slade*

On my last few visits to Washington, I have spoken with you and other members of the delegation about the resolution of property ownership interests on McGlinn Island so that the island could be permanently secured for conservation purposes. I am now writing to re-emphasize that interest, and to urge you to support full funding for this acquisition contained in the 1991 Interior Department/BIA budget.

I first became aware of this issue almost two years ago when local citizens in the LaConner/Skagit County area contacted my office seeking assistance in securing the island as a natural park. Our subsequent contacts and negotiations with local officials, the owners, and the Swinomish tribe have led to the current proposal for acquisition and environmental protection.

McGlinn Island, directly south of Pioneer Park in LaConner, is one of the few remaining examples of an undisturbed natural landscape in the Puget Sound region. Once a 50 acre island at the confluence of the Swinomish Slough and the north fork of the Skagit River, it was gradually connected to the mainland by the Army Corps of Engineers dredge spoils taken from the Swinomish Channel. Before the slough was dredged, the navigable channel for the river was to the east of McGlinn Island. Subsequently, the island and connecting "causeway" were sold by the state of Washington to the Dunlop family. After being in family ownership for nearly 50 years, the Dunlop family discovered, in trying to sell the property, that there was a cloud on the title because of underlying tribal claims to the island and causeway. These claims were based on the original treaty document and associated map defining the Swinomish reservation boundaries as extending to the original navigable waterway.

I have had our Natural Heritage Program plant ecologist conduct a site evaluation of the island. The attached report indicates that the island contains high quality examples of native grasslands and a unique Douglas fir/madrone association forest type. Having walked around the island with representatives of the tribe, I can attest to its relatively undisturbed condition.

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As well, the headlands of the island provide spectacular views of the north end of Skagit Bay and the extensive marshlands at the mouth of the river. The island also forms a critical link on the flyway between the Skagit Bay Wildlife Refuge administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Padilla Bay National Estuarine Sanctuary.

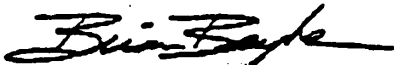
I have met with Swinomish tribal officials and believe that the current proposal satisfies the interests of all parties and will permanently resolve issues of equity, tribal interests, and environmental protection. By purchasing the ownership interests of the Dunlop family and the other owners, their long-standing rights in the property will be equitably addressed. Acquisition by the federal government, on behalf of the tribe, will permanently resolve the reservation boundaries. Tribal ownership, with a requirement of controlled public access, will assure a reasonable level of public use that will not jeopardize the fragile ecosystems on the island. As indicated in the attached resolution, the Skagit County Board of Commissioners also supports this proposal.

The Department of Natural Resources is also prepared to contribute funds from its Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account to develop a secure access point with interpretive materials about the fresh and saltwater wetland systems surrounding the island.

This appropriation will permanently protect an important part of our state's natural heritage, resolve a long-standing boundary dispute, and equitably address current property owner's interests. I urge your support to fully fund this project.

Please contact my office if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Brian Boyle  
Commissioner of Public Lands

cc: The Honorable Norm Dicks  
The Honorable Al Swift

Original letter also sent to Senator Brock Adams